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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

(39) M-647 Memorandum of Conversation

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PARTICIPANTS: Wilhelm G. Grewe, German Ambassador
Mr. Franz Krapf, German Minister
Mr. Livingston T. Merchant, EUR
Mr. Alfred G. Vigderman, GER

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Mr. Merchant briefly described the draft reply to the Soviet Note of March 2, 1959, and handed a copy to Dr. Grewe. To Dr. Grewe's question as to why we preferred Geneva over Vienna Mr. Merchant replied that our mechanical facilities at Geneva were better than those at Vienna, and that the UN facilities at Geneva were likewise superior. Moreover, we preferred to meet on thoroughly neutral ground. Austria's neutrality is really of quite short term compared to that of Switzerland. Nevertheless, we would not make the choice of Geneva a sticking point if the other three powers were to insist on Vienna. Dr. Grewe said Bonn's view was that Geneva had become so associated with unsuccessful conferences it was perhaps a poor choice for that reason.

Dr. Grewe said he understood that the United Kingdom Foreign Office wished to postpone the decision on the nature of a reply to the Soviet note until after Mr. Macmillan had completed his current round of visits. Mr. Merchant replied that there was very good reason for a prompt reply. Delay would suggest to the public vacillation and uncertainty on the part of the West. We should show a prompt and forthcoming desire to sit down with the Russians. To this Dr. Grewe agreed.

When Mr. Merchant raised the question of the withdrawal of the French fleet from NATO command, Dr. Grewe indicated that he was not informed on this subject.

Reverting to the question of the reply to the Soviet note, Mr. Merchant explained that it was our view that the Working Group should not be burdened with the task of developing the draft reply, given the fact that it had other important

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work to do with serious limitations on its available time. However, at the final stages of the drafting, and in connection with transmission of the note to NATO, the group might play a role.

On planning against the turnover of control at the checkpoints to the GDR authorities, Mr. Merchant explained that we are preparing to take quiet measures to strengthen our ~~force~~ over a period of time of a kind which would be observed by Soviet intelligence, but not by the general public. The details will have to be worked out by the three commanders in Germany. If a convoy should encounter force we would then take more overt measures of military preparedness, and intensify our political and diplomatic offensive. Our representatives in Bonn are trying to work out contingency plans to meet the various possibilities. To Dr. Grewe's question as to the role of the UN in this field Mr. Merchant said we were undecided. The question was under intensive examination. Dr. Grewe and Mr. Merchant agreed that calling on the UN creates the impression that the West was trying to escape its responsibility. Nevertheless the West had to keep in mind that the problem might be put into the UN, without our having taken the initiative, by other UN members.

Dr. Grewe raised the question as to whether a joint congressional statement on Berlin and Germany was in prospect. Mr. Merchant explained that we are opposed to resolutions, particularly of a detailed kind. In fact the President had full authority to deal with the situation.

The President, as Dr. Grewe knows, was opposed to partial mobilization. Our position is well understood - the West will not fire the first shot.

Mr. Merchant explained that we contemplated there would be a meeting of the Four Foreign Ministers before the NATO April 2 meeting - (2 days - March 31st and April 1st) which would be preceded by a meeting of the Three Powers having legal responsibility for Berlin. The Ministers would have these two days to review the Working Group report (which should be distributed several days before) and to take the steps necessary to accelerate the completion of the task of the Working Group and agree how the subject was to be presented to the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting.

On the Macmillan-Khrushchev ^{had a} ~~first-hand~~ ^{first-hand} account from the British Prime Minister. We would not want, at this stage, to read too much into the ~~communic~~ ^{communicate}. It remained the case, however, that we are opposed to advancing positions on nuclear test suspension which would weaken the adequacy of controls. A truly adequate uninhibited control mechanism was vital. As far as practical security measures were concerned, these, Mr. Merchant thought, were inseparable from political settlements. We continue to insist on maintaining a link between changes in the military position and a settlement of the political problems. Finally, we see more dangers than virtues in a non-aggression pact with the Soviets, particularly since all UN members ^{are} ~~are~~ already committed to non-aggression. A non-aggression pact could raise false hopes.

Mr. Merchant then outlined the U.S. formulation of the substance of a position which we might negotiate with the Soviets. Pointing out the ad referendum nature of the position, Mr. Merchant described generally the paper entitled "Elements of a Western Position". Dr. Grewe was particularly interested in the concept that the
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Laender Governments would participate in the carrying out of the plan by contributing members to an all-German body. He pointed out that in the GDR, Laender Government had completely disappeared. Mr. Merchant suggested that in presenting our position to the Soviets we should give the Soviets the outline of the whole plan in order to show that the elements were undissolubly related to each other.

Dr. Grewe suggested the desirability of arranging to replace the Soviets at the checkpoints with UN officials, in an effort to avoid contact with GDR police at the checkpoints. Mr. Merchant thought that this might be considered but pointed out that one had to know first to whom the UN personnel would be responsible, where they would come from and other similar problems which UN intervention in such matters inevitably raises. While there might be enthusiasm to use UN forces to help solve a political problem at the start, with the passage of time the governments involved begin to lose interest and begin to worry about the financial burden.

Dr. Grewe asked whether the negotiating position with the Soviets which had been outlined was a position from which we were prepared to fall back to another position. Mr. Merchant said that what he had described to Ambassador Grewe was our true position. There is no real room for further concessions. He suggested that it was highly unlikely that the Soviets were prepared at this stage to give up the GDR. In fact, therefore, we had to advance as our initial position what was pretty much our final position, considering that we would be involved in an exercise that was at least as much a public relations exercise as a negotiation.

Dr. Grewe asked whether we thought the Soviets would make difficulties on the matter of German participation. Mr. Merchant replied that it was his impression that this would raise no problem.

Dr. Grewe said that on the German side they would be willing to contribute something on the preservation of the "social gains" of the GDR, and to agree to refrain from persecution of officials of the GDR regime.

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Dr. Grewe suggested the desirability of making a statement on the degree to which identification at checkpoints would be carried out, and explaining that there were precise limits to what would be tolerated at the checkpoints. Such a statement would declare that any measures hampering access would not be tolerated and would be met with force.

Mr. Merchant agreed that this idea had merit.

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